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"THE FREEDOM OF THE CHURCH."

A SERMON,

PREACHED IN THE

Church of St. John the Evangelist,

MONTREAL.

BY

THE REV. WILLIAM WRIGHT, M.D.,

ON THE

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT, 1877.

(PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.)

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TO

Our Mother

IN WHOM WE WERE NEW-BORN TO GOD,

IN WHOM WE HAVE BEEN FED

ALL OUR LIFE LONG UNTIL THIS DAY,

IN WHOSE BOSOM WE HOPE TO DIE,

The Church of England,

BELOVED AND AFFLICTED,

AND BY AFFLICTION PURIFIED,

ONCE THE PARENT OF SAINTS,

NOW THROUGH OUR SINS FALLEN, YET ARISING,

IN

REVERENT AND GRATEFUL AFFECTION,

FROM

HER HUMBLEST AND MOST UNWORTHY SON,

WITH THE EARNEST PRAYER

THAT HIS INFIRMITIES AND SHORT-SIGHTEDNESS

MAY NOT ANY WAY GOD'S GRACIOUS WORK TOWARDS HER,

NOR WHAT IS PURPOSED

FOR THE HOLINESS OF HER CHILDREN

BRING AUGHT OF ILL TO HER.

SERMON.

Gal. iv. 26 : "Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all."

THESE words refer to the Church,—to the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. They are her royal charter, proclaiming her freedom, and our Divine authority for maintaining that freedom in the face of all opposition.

The Church is free from the law, free from man, free from bondage, and free from tyranny; that is, by the will of God. She is free by her existence, her power, and her ministrations; that is, as the appointment of God. She is free because she is God's, and His alone.

The Church is free, free to all, whether Jew or Gentile,—to all of every nation. Every one is free to share in her priceless blessings, and to all they are free "without money and without price." But not only is she thus free, she is also free "in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free."

To assure us of her freedom she is called "Jerusalem which is above." So if you would see what the Church is designed to be by God's will, you must look up to Heaven, to the glorious abode of "the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity," whose hand none can stay,—and see her picture there. Heaven is free from sin, and wrong, and cruelty. And as they are unknown there, they should likewise be unknown in the Church.

To enforce the truth of the Church's freedom upon us more deeply, we are shown, in the Epistle which has

just been read, what she is not like. She is not like Mount Sinai, bleak and desolate, dark and forbidding, with rugged peaks and barren sides,—for all these speak of oppression. Nor is she like Agar,—for whom that mount stands,—since Agar is the memorial of such as are in man's bondage, and have to bear, as she bore, persecution, and banishment, and punishment. Nor is the Church even like "Jerusalem which now is,"—for in spite of all that city's glitter of gold and marble, in spite of her busy streets and gorgeous temple, she is captive, she is crushed by the Roman yoke and trodden under foot by the Gentiles. No, the Church is like none of these, nor anything else that is not free. If you would know what she is by God's will, you must lift your eyes beyond earthly things, and look up to "Jerusalem above," and learn from that sight. As Heaven is free, so is the Church to be free. It cannot be otherwise, for Heaven and the Church are one. They are parts of the one, same, holy, free state. Jerusalem which is above is not merely an emblem of the Church, but is the Church. Rejoice, then, oh rejoice, "Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all."

Alas! that there should be any bitterness in this cup of joy. But men have ever tried to thwart God's will and to mar His work. And I am ashamed and grieved to say that in this our day,—our day of free-thinking and ungodliness—the freedom of our Church is called in question. And because of this, all England is agitated, and the Church herself convulsed, and so violently that there is risk of her being rent in twain by the struggle.

Out of her own bosom have sprung up those who are troubling her and piercing her through and through with many sorrows. This, indeed, may be hard to understand. However, the history of Joseph, read at this time in the

first lessons, will help to simplify its comprehension. As Jacob's family was distracted by the conduct of his elder sons towards the younger brother, so is it now in the family of the Church. Her elder children who call themselves Evangelicals have set themselves up against their younger brethren whom they nick-name Ritualist, Dreamer. As Jacob's elder sons treated Joseph, so these elder sons of the Church have risen up against the younger. They have hated them, hounded them down, persecuted them, and tried to harry them out of the land. They have delivered them over to strangers to enslave them;—and they have had the satisfaction of seeing one whom they went about to kill cast into a foul jail, as a common felon, among thieves and harlots. And for all this they have received large sums of money in contribution or exchange. Oh! wondrous parallel in the history of Joseph and of the Church!

I am sure this is a subject which will strike a chord in the breast of every one who hears me. Who has not an interest in his mother? who feels not for her? who is not affected by what affects her? And is not the Church our mother? Is not "Jerusalem which is above the mother of us all?" Remember that it was through her you received the "new birth unto righteousness." It was she who taught your infant lips to pray, gave you "the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" in her "form of sound words," led you along the narrow way of holiness, confirmed you with many excellent gifts of the Spirit, and fed you with the only food and strength and refreshment of your souls. It is she who consecrates and solemnizes every event in your life. It is she

" That o'er our life presides,
The birth, the bridal and the grave,
And many an hour besides! "

She rejoices with you in your sunshine, condole with you in your afflictions, and when you die she will consign your body to the silent tomb "in sure and certain hope of 'the resurrection to eternal life." Oh ! dear, sweet mother ! Oh gentle, tender mother, full of affection and devotion, full of benevolence and solicitude, careful for every emergency, and supplying, from thy Husband, our every want, let thy constraining influence prevail with us to love thee more and more and to maintain thy freedom. "Happy shall he be that rewardeth" those who have wasted thee.

The conflict now warring is on the one side a strife to waste the Church by giving up her liberty, and on the other side it is a defence to prevent that wasting by upholding her freedom. The one side makes nothing of God's solemn declaration, "Jerusalem which is above is free." The other side makes everything of this precious truth. The one side, I mean the elder brethren, claim freedom for themselves but deny it to the poor Ritualists. They usurp authority over them, and say, you have the Gospel to preach in your pulpits, and you have the sacrament to celebrate at your altars—you certainly have the freedom to do so ; but we neither like what you teach, nor your way of officiating, and we will take away your freedom in these. We have set ourselves up as your self-constituted rulers and judges and executioners. When a question arises as to the meaning of a doctrine or the propriety of a ceremonial, we shall and we must decide what the solution is to be. If you will not accept our decision and be driven by us, we will appeal to others. We will not appeal to the Church or Convocation. No. Whatever freedom the Church may have to "decree rites or ceremonies," and settle "controversies of faith," we will ignore. We will pass her by, and we

will go to secular courts,—to Parliament, the House of Lords, the Privy Council, the Public Worship Act,—in short we will call in the aid of anything we can manage. And then we will set the iron heel of the State upon the neck of you Ritualists, and bring you into a bondage worse than that typified by Sinai, or Agar, or “Jerusalem which now is.”

The mistake in all this is at once obvious. It is “a transgression of the law” that “Jerusalem which is above is free.” Instead of determining the dispute by the law or mind of Christ;—brother goes to law against brother, and strives to end it by “self-appointed, technical, human law.” The Church is not allowed to mind her own business, or settle her own affairs. The spiritualities, contrary to all intention, both of God and the State, are meddled with and regulated by the laity or a secular body. So that you see the question in debate is this: Is Jerusalem above free, or is she not? Is the Church free to govern herself,—or is she so enslaved that the State shall govern her without her consent?

There should be no hesitation here as to “what is truth.” *Firstly.* The State is incompetent. The State has no right to decide alone what doctrine or ritual shall be. The State has no right to enforce its rule upon either one or other of these without the consent or concurrence of the Church. The State or laity has no authority in spiritual matters. God alone has the needed authority. He alone can give it. But He never gave it to the State or laity. Where there is no spiritual authority, there can be no spiritual sanction. Where there is no such power, no lawful obedience to assumptions can be claimed.

What is the British Parliament? It is “an assemblage, consisting, to some extent, of Jews and infidels, and, to a very great degree, of men who are professed non-members

of the Church they presume to judge." Are these the men to legislate in her spiritualities? Is such an assembly to be worshipped rather than the Almighty,—is their bondage to be accepted rather than His freedom?

What is the judicial committee of the Privy Council? It was never intended by its founder to exercise jurisdiction in spiritual matters. It has pronounced judgments diametrically opposed to the Church,—as in the Essays and Reviews case. And it has given birth to verdicts upon the same points which the highest law authority has said are irreconcilable. Are the decrees of such a committee to be preferred to those of the infallible God and His Church?

And what is the present substitute for that Council—what is the Public Worship Regulation Act that it should be respected? Is an untimely thing like that which was designed to facilitate worship—but instead of that has shut up churches and put large parishes under an interdict—has touched the Lord's anointed and done His prophets harm—and has scattered His sheep,—is a miserable failure of that sort to be respected?

Surely the incompetency of the State is evident, aye, self-evident.

Secondly. The Church is fully qualified to govern herself. God has stamped the Church's freedom by granting her a power which man can neither give nor take away,—and, having that power, she is free, independent of all else. That power came down from above, when "Heaven's eternal arches rang" with "Glory to God in the highest," when the glad tidings went forth of the birth of a Saviour,—and it was left as His legacy before He went back to where He had been before. That is the power, which makes all free who yield themselves to its rule and live up to its principles,—free from

sin, free from its guilt, dominion and punishment. That power is the power of the keys. It is the power to graft into Christ's body, through Holy Baptism, all who are to have Him formed within them; it is the power, in the Apostolic rite of Confirmation, to lay hands on those who are to be enriched with the gifts of the Holy Spirit; it is the power to celebrate or offer the blessed sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood in sacrificial memorial,—to feed devout communicants with the Bread of Life, and to refresh them with the Cup of Salvation. It is the power which was given by the Father to Christ, and by Him to His Apostles, and by them to their successors, and by these to others, and so on, "age by age and year by year" to this very time.

God has not only given the Church this wondrous power, but He has also endued her with the knowledge of how it should be applied. He has taught her the doctrines she should teach, and the ritual in which to worship. He has done so generally in His word; and He has done so more definitely when He came down, as of old, at Pentecost, upon the Fathers in their councils. Then He shewed them, by an unerring light, the truth of the creeds;—and from Him, undoubtedly, came the directions for usages or "ways in Christ" which have since been handed down by "traditions" or "ordinances" that have been held as they had been taught.

Moreover, God is ever present with His Church, to guide her into all truth, and by His Spirit "the whole body of the Church is governed."

Surely, then, with these Divine advantages, she has all she can need to manage her own affairs. Surely all who obey God rather than men will do as He bids them—"Hear the Church,"—and leave spiritualities to her alone

or to her with such help as she may seek and approve of. And if any be asked where is your authority for yielding to the Church rather than to a mere secular tribunal or opinion,—the answer should be this: God the Father who sent the Son to build the Church, God the Son who “loved the Church and gave Himself for it,” God the Holy Ghost who sanctifies the Church, God,—the ever blessed, holy and glorious Trinity,—He is our authority.

Thirdly. To allow the State to interfere in spiritualities, apart from the Church, is a violation of constitutional liberties, an infringement of vested rights. When England began to be an established kingdom, William the Conqueror issued a royal decree to keep the Church free from the grasp of the secular power. It prohibited any one, bishop or otherwise, to bring any cause which pertained to the cure of souls to the judgment of secular men. Well would it have been had the present bishops—so timid and so time-serving—not broken this decree. By their doing so, they are to blame for much of the present distress. They have armed the elder brethren with their deadly weapons. Till the bishops are unseated in England’s Senate, England’s Church will never be free. But to go on with the historical proof that the Church’s spiritualities are free by the law of the land. When famous magna charta was granted—“a document far superior to mere statutes, in being the basis of constitutional liberties”—it was expressly stated therein that “for us and for our heirs for ever the Church of England shall be free,” and “shall have her rights unimpaired and her liberties inviolate.” Still later on, her freedom was again asserted. In the Statute of Appeals of Henry the 8th, the separate and independent existence of the spiritualities and temporalities was defined and recognized. And in years afterwards, when the troublesome period of

the Reformation was over, the same freedom is once more proclaimed,—as you may read in the royal declaration prefixed to the Thirty-nine Articles. There the right of settling spiritual questions is reserved to the spirituality of the Church with the consent of the Crown, *i. e.* the Sovereign.

What clearer proof can be needed that the Church is free to govern herself? What clearer proof of the injustice of the persecution still raging, and of the legality of the stand made against its attacks?

Well may you wonder what could have been the cause of this persecution which, to gain its ends, would strip the Church of its freedom, and would give up the things of God to Cæsar. What has kindled the wrath of the elder brethren? It is not ceremonial. It is not, as has been said, the use of vestments. Joseph's coat did not fire the anger of his brethren. They may have envied him the more because of it, but they hated him for a worse reason. What, then, has kindled the bitterness against Ritualists? It is not because they do not go by their order book, as the Duke of Wellington called the Prayer-book. Not at all. They cling to that dear old book. They wish to have it left unaltered. They want to be left to use it as it was understood when it was drawn up. They appeal to their close compliance with its rubrics. Why, then, are they so persecuted? It is not because they are disobedient to the Church, or to authority ecclesiastically or properly constituted. On the contrary, they express themselves willing to "be ruled by the principles of appeal to the canons, articles, etc., of the Church," and to the usages of the undivided Church. Nay, more, they consent to "obey any court having the sanction of the Church or Convocation, Parliament and Crown, when framed according to the express constitutional laws of

the Church and realm of England." What can be more fair or just? Whatever, therefore, may be the cause of the attempt to put them down, it is not church lawlessness on their part. What, then, can be the cause of their being so bitterly hated? It looks very much like jealousy. It may not be that, but it is very like it. It was this inflamed the hatred of Jacob's elder sons against Joseph. "Israel loved Joseph more than all his children." Joseph had succeeded more than they had in winning the old man's affections. Ritualists have also succeeded where others have failed. They have succeeded in fostering a higher devotional life among the people, in raising up within them greater personal religion, in bringing them into more frequent communion with God, in opening up more numerous spheres of usefulness, etc. Society is morally low, and it has ever felt a jealousy against those who work their way above its level.

Of all the passions that haunt the heart, this one of jealousy is the most accursed. While we, my brethren, strive, through grace, to kill all vices, let us make sure that not a trace of jealousy lives within us; and let us pray for all who are its unhappy victims. It is more pestilent than the plague, more terrible than death, fiercer than hell. It is the counterpoise of all the transports of beauty. And it rewards all who cherish it with an awful doom.

It is recorded in Grecian story that "Theagenes, a celebrated victor in the public games of Greece, had a famous statue raised to him by his countrymen, and one of his rivals, inspired by the demon passion of jealousy, went forth in the silence and darkness of night, and endeavored to throw it down by repeated blows. At last he succeeded,—but before he could escape it fell from its pedestal and crushed him to death." This fact

not only shews the restless torment of this passion, but symbolizes the doom of its possessor. He who seeks to destroy the glory of a rival, crushes his own soul in the attempt. He who would rob another of his liberty, casts himself into bondage.

What will be the result of the present strife? Oh! to the persecuted it will be a glorious triumph, "Jerusalem which is above is free," and must be free. God's word cannot fail. Truth must prevail. You know Joseph went not up to the throne of Egypt,—the gold chain was not put about his neck,—till after he had been first punished. An opening has already been gained, and it only requires to be followed up to lead on to victory. There was once a battle set in array between the Austrians and Swiss. "There were many valiant men in the Swiss army,—and again and again they came on, but again and again they were driven back. For the Austrians, standing shoulder to shoulder, held out their spears before them so as to make, as it were, an iron fence which neither man nor horse could break through. Among the Swiss there was one who, seeing this, cried out, 'Take care of my wife and children, I will break their ranks.' He threw away his armor, rushed in upon the enemy, took as many spears as he could in his breast and arms and body, and so fell down dead at the very moment he broke through the fence. The others rushed in after him, and the Austrians were soon put to flight."

But while we are enthusiastic,—it must be borne in mind that success in this great struggle for freedom can only be had by striving to the utmost to obtain a recognition of the grand truth that "Jerusalem which is above is free,"—to obtain "a recognition of the catholic claims of the Church of England, and of her true historic character, and of her community with the past."

"Delight thyself in the Lord," and, as the dear children of "the Mother of us all,"—the dear children of Him who is her spouse,—try to please Him in all things as she bids you. Try to win His smile by being free from all sin. And, as this season teaches,—“watch and “pray” more and more “prove yourselves,” and use holy discipline. Bring out in your daily lives the will of God which is your sanctification. Gain steps in advance towards that perfect freedom where fear is cast out, and towards that blessed unity which is agreeable to the mind of Jesus. “Delight thyself in the Lord, and He shall grant thee the desire of thine heart.”

“Stand fast in the Faith. Quit you like men,” like true hearted sons “of the Mother of us all,” and when “the shadows flee away” you “shall shine forth as the Sun,”—free as “Jerusalem which is above is free.”

NOTE.—The dedication, from the pen of one of the most revered and learned of the Church's Doctors, is prefixed to this sermon at the instance of a dear friend of the writer.

